The Alter

A Sermon
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"The altar that sanctifies the gift"
Matthew 23:19.

Had man remained perfect, his communion with God would have been as unrestricted as that of an obedient child with an affectionate father. Adam might have worshiped his God acceptably anywhere, at any time, and in any mode he chose. Had there been literal offerings as well as sacrifices of praise, he might have brought before his God the delicious fruits of the garden or poured forth libations from Eden's golden-sanded river—and these might have been presented on the high places of the earth or in the shady groves, or amid the verdure of the plains—anywhere the Lord would have received the grateful offerings of men whose hearts were perfect towards Himself.

But the Fall intervened. Man became a rebel to his King. Man, by his depravity of nature, was placed far off from God, and his once unrestricted fellowship with Heaven was brought to an end. Mercy gave tidings of renewed communion, but the good news came by slow degrees. And meanwhile, if man would approach his God, it must be under rules and regulations which should remind him of his changed estate. If he is permitted to draw near to his offended God at all it is a great favor, and he shall be made to learn by the way of coming how great that favor is. He shall, before a fuller ceremonial is revealed, only be allowed to offer a bleeding sacrifice.

He shall not present to God that which costs him nothing—the growth of the soil—but he must bring a victim from his flock or herd, and by his own hand he must cause the victim to suffer and die, for God will accept only a life poured forth in blood as a sacrifice from man, whose own life was forfeited to justice. And while rules and regulations were laid down as to sacrifices, altars were also under commandment—they must be built of earth or unhewn stone—and at the last all altars of burnt-offering were suppressed, save one only, the consecrated bronze altar of the tabernacle. All the rest of the world was left without altars.

One spot was selected, and only one. First in the place where the tabernacle was pitched, and afterwards the temple of Jerusalem, the altar for bloody sacrifice was set up. And everywhere else, when men offered to God on their high places, they did so in defiance of His command. Prophets might make exceptions to the rule, but for the many, the unbending rule was that all sacrifice must be made at the one holy altar. Brethren, the outward Truth of God clearly reveals to us its inner meaning. We must, had we remained innocent, have

brought before God every day the thank-offerings of our hearts without a mediator—but we are guilty and our holiest acts are the deeds of imperfect men—and our purest worship is the worship of fallen beings.

Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. And before we can be accepted in our best things, there must be the shedding of the blood which takes away sin. There is no door of acceptance for us except through the merit of the great Surety who solemnly laid down His life for His people! There is but one way by which we, who have been washed in the blood of Jesus, can offer unto God our humble service and our loving hearts, namely, through Jesus Christ who stands as the type of that one and only permitted altar! To Him we must bring ourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God—for it is only by Jesus Christ that this reasonable service can be accepted of the Most High.

In the one altar of the tabernacle or the temple, we see a type of the Person and merit of our glorious Lord Jesus, and learn that apart from Him there is no acceptable worship—for this is the Truth of God which we desire, this morning, to teach. Many mistakes have been made through applying the emblem of an altar to matters to which it has no correct reference. There was but one authorized altar of Jehovah, as we have already noted—that one altar finds its fulfillment in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. But through loose talking, if not through doctrinal error, other things have come to be called altars which are not so—certainly not such altars as meet the requirements of my text, for they do not sanctify the gift and are not greater than the gift.

Frequently have we seen the Cross spoken of as an altar. Upon the Cross, as upon an altar, our Lord is said to have been offered as the great Sacrifice for sin. But the expression is mere poetic flourish and no more. As a Man, Jesus died on the Cross and the wood to which He was nailed was a gallows—not an altar—it was never appointed as such by God, nor is it ever so called in His Word. The cross of wood was simply the instrument of our Savior's torture and death, and is no more to be reverenced than the whips of Pilate or the spit of the scoffers. The Cross used at Calvary, and all other crosses, whether of wood, or stone, or gold, are no more to be esteemed than the same material shaped in circles or squares.

Indeed, if we are to attach any kind of moral quality to the material and visible form of the Cross, it is rather a thing accursed than a thing to be blessed, for the Divine curse fell on everyone that was hanged on a tree. Certainly this fancied altar of the Cross in no way sanctified the victim. What honor did our Lord Jesus derive from the tree on which He hung? What virtue came from this so-called altar to make God's unspeakable gift acceptable? A piece of wood and nothing more was that Cross! It could give no sanctity to Christ and we ought never to use words concerning that piece of timber which would in any way lead men to associate its material substance with the meritorious work of Christ.

It is to be feared that the constant use of the emblem of the cross, in itself as innocent as an oval or a square, often leads men into a species of idolatry. When I see a cross embossed on Bibles, worked out in jewelry or fashioned gold, I cannot but think how contradictory it all seems—the Cross, a thing of shame, the instrument of our Lord's execution by those who abhorred Him—and yet worn as an ornament! Surely men might as well wear at their girdles the dagger with which their friend was stabbed! Why do not the ladies wear a gallows from their necks? For what more or less is a cross? Such was not the cross which Paul gloried in—he would have despised such idolatry.

Paul gloried in the Gospel, which is a spiritual cross, and he says of it, "By which the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world." Which of those cross-wearers was ever crucified to the world by the cross which dangles on their bosoms? The sign of the cross, when reverenced, is much the same as the bronze serpent when Israel fell to adoring it—it must be broken and Christian people should discountenance its use. Clearly it is no altar! We occasionally read, and especially in poetry, of the "altar of the heart," but is not that also a misnomer, and may it not one day lead to doctrinal error? The heart an altar? It certainly does not sanctify the gift!

If there is anything in the gift that is acceptable to God its sanctity must come from its being offered on a very different altar than that of our poor, corrupt, and depraved heart! I know the meaning is that sincerity makes our service acceptable, but I doubt the truth of that assertion, for however sincere our devotions may be, apart from the Atonement of Jesus, God does not accept them! Sincerity there must be or there can be no offering made to God at all—but still, all the sincerity that ever dwelt in human bosom could not make an offering to be received of God unless faith found an altar in Jesus and relied for acceptance upon the grand Sacrifice and finished Atonement of the Mediator. Talk not quite so loosely lest mischief come of it.

A more common and dangerous mistake, however, is to call the table which is used for the purpose of the Lord's Supper an altar. If it had been called a house, or a horse, or an angel—either title would have been quite as correct a name—for there is no likeness whatever between the table of communion and an altar. The mistake is offensive and the mischief flowing from it is most terrible. All through Scripture we read of the communion table, but never find it either plainly, obscurely, directly, or indirectly called an altar. Jesus said, "The hand of him that betrays Me is with Me on the table." He did not say, "The traitor is officiating with Me at this altar," and yet surely that first celebration was quite as complete as any which have succeeded it!

Paul says, "You cannot be partakers of the Lord's Table and of the table of the devil," and that, too, in a connection in which he would surely have said the Lord's Altar had the term been allowable. Neither, except by the most violent straining can there be found any passage of Scripture which represents this table, used to celebrate a feast, as an altar for the

consumption of a sacrifice. Indeed, what sacrifice do the modern priests place upon their so-called altars? See, they bring forth bread and wine—fit furniture for a table—but where are the fire and the wood for a burnt-offering? If the table is an altar, then according to our Lord, it is better and holier than the bread and wine placed upon it, for the "altar sanctifies the gift." And yet our modern ritualists will hardly venture to say that their altars of wood and stone are really more holy than the body and blood of Jesus Christ which they profess to offer on them!

I know not to what length folly may go, but one thing I marvel at—if these gentlemen need to have a material altar, why do they not follow the Scriptural form for one? Why do they make a kind of sideboard or dresser of it, by setting it against a wall—a thing that was never heard of in all the world before, for everywhere altars are so placed as to be compassed about. David said, "So will I compass Your altar, O Lord." Elijah dug a trench about the altar. The altar of the Old Testament could be surrounded—but from where came these new-fashioned erections which are not even according to the fashion of Judaism?

From what heathenism did they borrow their steps to the altar, such things being forbidden of the Lord? Where did they contrive their "high altar"? What means those ornaments on an altar? Strange intrusions, these, for an altar! Surely they must have taken their models from those altars of Baal, of which we read that there were images on high above them—for how commonly do we see either their pieces of plate with superstitious symbols, or their sumptuous common prayer books, adorned with silver crucifixes! And what is worse, pictures and images, and candles, and I know not what of trumpery besides? Let us never, therefore, use the term altar as synonymous with the communion table lest we countenance deadly error.

Of all delusions that have ever happened to the human race, surely that of transubstantiation has been at once the most absurd and the most profane! Both that doctrine and all growing out of it should be protested against by every sincere Christian, especially at this dreary time when superstition is daily increasing. If ever we shall have Popery back in this land it will owe much of its advance to the misuse of terms. Call not a table an altar lest you come to bow before it as the Popish heathens do! Use it as a table of fellowship and communion, but never dream of it as an altar! The one Altar which sanctifies the gift is the Person and merit of our Lord Jesus Christ, and nothing else!

Come we then to the consideration of this subject. I shall first refer you to the passage in the book of Exodus in which the great bronze altar of the tabernacle was described, and try to work out the type as it reveals our Lord. And then, secondly, I shall ask a few practical questions.

I. In the 27th chapter of the book of Exodus you have the Lord's command: "And you shall make an altar of acacia wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad. The altar shall be four-square: and the height thereof shall be three cubits. And you shall make the horns of

it upon the four corners thereof: its horns shall be of the same: and you shall overlay it with brass."

Jesus Christ is the antitype of this bronze altar. All that it signified typically, we have in Him. And first the altar typifies our Lord, if we consider the use of it. The altar had at least two uses. First, to sanctify that which was put upon it, and then, secondly, to sustain it or bear it up while the fire was consuming it. Our Lord Jesus is Himself the Sacrifice as well as the Altar. Whatever is offered to God by Him or by us is accepted, because of the excellence of His Person. As God and perfect Man in one Person, all that He does and all that He presents becomes acceptable because of the excellence that dwells in Him. And so, also, He bears and sustains all the violent heat both of the fire of Divine wrath and the fire of Divine Presence which consumes the sacrifice put upon the altar.

How our Lord Jesus Christ lifts up our gifts towards Heaven! How of old did He lift up our sins! And when the holy flame descended and consumed Him, as the great Victim for human guilt, what strength and power there was in Him, fitting Him like an altar of brass to endure all those furious flames! And now, today, He does sweetly lift up before God all the offerings of His people and renders them acceptable in Himself! The old Puritans were apt to say that the altar represented the Deity of Christ because the Deity of Christ lent power as well as virtue to the Manhood of Christ—but may we not consider His entire Person to be the sustaining and sanctifying Altar of mediation?

As the One appointed Mediator for mankind, He puts a value into the gifts of His people and His own Sacrifice derives efficacy from His Person and Character. In Him we are able to bear the Presence of God when He accepts us, for our God is a consuming fire and we can only meet Him in Jesus! It is only on the bronze altar that the heavenly fire can consume our sacrifice. The wrath which consumes Jesus has endured once and for all that glory of consuming love we are able to learn through our union with the Incarnate God.

Let it never, then, be forgotten by us all that if our souls and bodies, which we offer to God, are to be presented before the Lord, it must be by Christ as an Altar! And if we are to be sanctified and rendered acceptable, it must still be by Christ as an Altar! There never could be but this one Altar for Israel—for all Israel, according to Divine appointment— this was the only Altar. Every victim must be slaughtered here! Every acceptable burnt-offering must be brought here, and so with us. We cannot offer a prayer, much less ourselves, except by Him. There is one Christ for all the saints. One Jesus for you who are grown in Divine Grace. One Jesus for those who are but beginners in spiritual things. One Lord Jesus for the black and filthy sinner when he first seeks for mercy. One Lord Jesus for the Christian made perfect when he enters into his rest!

There is but one Altar for all Israel, and that one Altar for all times—for Israel in the days of Moses, for Israel in the days of Solomon—for Israel until the end of the dispensation. You and I come to God by the same road which was traveled by David, and afterwards by

the Lord's Apostles. Never a Believer accepted except in Jesus, in any age! Never a word done that was acceptable to God in any period except through Jesus Christ! One Altar, and only one for all ages, for the whole chosen seed! We hold this as a Truth of God—let us prize it and defend it!

The place of the altar next deserves your consideration. You will remember that the moment you entered into the door of the tabernacle you saw this altar of burnt-offering, and before you could reach the veil which separated the holy from the Most Holy Place, you must pass hard by the altar. So at the very beginning of the Christian life, the first thing we have to learn is that we approach God through Jesus Christ! You know nothing of Christianity unless the most prominent thought of your soul is Jesus as the Mediator between you and God. Talk not of Christian example or of Christian holy teaching—these things are but secondary—you must know Jesus Christ as suffering and pouring out His soul unto death as a Propitiation for sin, or you do not know the inner sense of the Divine religion of the Cross.

Nobody could help seeing that bronze altar. Walking with his eyes open through that court, every observer must see it. There was its perpetual smoke and smell—and this everyone would perceive—while in itself it was so large and important that it could not be overlooked. Even so, my Hearer, you cannot abide in the religion of Jesus, even for an hour, without beholding Him and without resting in Him. You know nothing unless you know Him as the Altar of God! The way to the Most Holy Place was by this Altar. "No man comes to the Father but by Me."

We cannot enter into fellowship with God, nor understand the deep things of God, nor penetrate into the Divine mysteries or the highest of the doctrines of the Truth of God except by first passing where the Atonement is offered and where Jesus stands—the only Mediator between God and man! How many have tried to learn the doctrines apart from Christ? And how many try to preach them! But they are unedifying and even lead to mischief. The best of all preaching of doctrines is such as that which we had in Dr. Hawker's day, when he preached election, but it was always election in Christ. The doctrine of predestination was clearly enough stated, but its sweet relationship to the Lamb of God was always dwelt upon. Let it be our desire, when we enter into the deep things of God, to view them in relation to Jesus, and pass by the Altar to reach the veil.

The form of the altar deserves our attention, as it helps to bring out something more of Christ. The altar was foursquare. Where shall we learn to measure the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths of the love of Christ that passes knowledge? If we may not so measure them just yet, it is satisfactory to know that everything about Christ is well ordered and arranged by Infinite Wisdom. The altar is not made haphazardly, it is four-square. There is no excess in Him, there is no lack in Him—all that we need to render our sacrifice

acceptable to God we have in Him. Ainsworth says that the form of four-square represents stability and endurance—and truly our Lord is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Other altars have been overturned, but this, never! The saints came to Him thousands of years ago, and there He stood between the porch and the veil. We come to Him today and He stands there still. And when the ages shall have passed by, and things that men have dreamed to be everlasting shall have melted like the morning's hoar frost, there shall still be the same Savior fixed in His place to offer, still, the prayers and the praises of His people.

At each corner of the altar was a horn. The horn is always the emblem of power, and these horns indicated, doubtless, the power which lies in the Person of Jesus Christ—the power with God on our behalf. We never need be afraid of acceptance in the Beloved when we see what might, what virtue, what sacred merit dwells in Him. God reject His Son?! Impossible! The Adored of angels, the eternally beloved must be accepted of God! Having given His hands to the nails, and His heart to the spear. Having suffered even unto death, it cannot be that the Lord should deny Him and disrespect His sacrifice. He must be forever prevalent with the Most High.

Put yourself on the Altar, Christian—God must accept you, for He accepts the victim because of the Altar which sanctifies the gift! He must accept you, feeble as you are, for Jesus infuses merit into you as the Altar into the gift. Come with your tears, come with your sighs and your groans, poor trembling ones—there is no fear but what you shall be victorious—those four horns indicate how meritorious Jesus is, and He will render you as acceptable as He is Himself! The altar, too, as we are describing its form, we must remember was built originally so low that it was reached by the priests without the use of steps, and, indeed, steps were expressly forbidden—the reason being given that, in going up to the altar, it might not be possible that the nakedness of the priest should be seen.

God would have nothing indecorous in His service. The spiritual meaning being, I suppose, that Jesus Christ, when we go to Him, is most accessible. We are not to climb to Him by steps of creature effort, merit, and preparation. Those preparations for Christ, of which so much is made by certain preachers, are all blasphemous. Divines will tell you you must feel this and feel the other. They say you must pass through this experience and the other. But truly—

> "All the fitness He requires,
> Is to feel your need of Him."

And this He gives you! There are no steps up to the Altar. There are no human preparations for Christ. You may come to Him just as you are, for He is waiting to be gracious. Solomon's altar in the temple was on a large scale, to show the greatness of our Lord's power and Divine Grace. And in order to maintain proportions, it was made much too high to be

reached without some mode of ascent—and it is supposed, therefore, that the priests reached it by a gradual incline, since steps must not be made to it.

And here we should be taught how, in coming to Christ, we ascent towards God. When we draw near unto Him with true hearts, we are elevated. Man is never more truly exalted in spirit than when he bows lowest at the foot of the Cross. Calvary, though it was no mountain, nor scarcely a hill, outsoars the Hermons and Pisgahs—its top is nearer Heaven than Carmel or Bashan—

> "Here it is I find my Heaven,
> While upon the Cross I gaze."

Let me but tarry there, and if I am not in Paradise, I should be, at least, in the suburbs of the New Jerusalem! No Truth of God is so dear as Jesus Crucified—the Altar of His Atonement is so low that a child may reach it—and yet it is so high that by it we ascend to Heaven!

It is notable, and you will kindly look, this afternoon, into your Bibles and investigate the matter, that this altar was increased in size in the temple. It was far smaller in the tabernacle than in the temple—so may our conceptions of Christ be ever growing! If we know Him well enough to find that He is sufficient for our present needs, may we yet understand His all-sufficiency. If we have discovered something of His excellence, and of the admirable way in which He secures our acceptance with God, may we know this more and more. May Jesus grow upon us, until unable to comprehend Him, we shall rejoice in His exceeding greatness and be filled with His fullness!

I must not forget, in speaking of the form of the altar, also, that as the observed passed round it, he would be constantly struck with its bespattered appearance. Entertain not the notion the tabernacle and the temple must have been very pleasant places—we can scarcely imagine anything that must have been more awe-inspiring and even revolting to the mind of the observer than the court of priests when sacrificing was being carried on. It must, on great occasions, have resembled a butcher's shambles with the addition of smoke and fire. And this bronze altar was so frequently besmeared with blood, and so constantly were there full bowls of warm gore thrown at its base, that it must have presented a very ghastly appearance.

This was all to teach the observer what a dreadful thing sin is, and how it can only be put away through suffering and death. The Lord did not study attractive aesthetics, He did not prepare a tabernacle that should delight men's tastes. It was rich, indeed, but so blood-stained as to be by no means beautiful. No staining of glass to charm the eye, but instead the guts of slaughtered bulls! Such sights would disgust the delicate tastes of the fops of this present age! Blood. Blood on every side! Death, fire, smoke and ashes mingled with the

bellowing of dying beasts—and the active exertions of men whose white garments were all crimson with the blood of victims! How clearly did the worshipers see the sternness and severity of the Justice of God against human sin, and the intensity of the agony of the great Son of God who was, in the fullness of time, by His own death to put away all the sins and transgressions of His people!

By faith come, my Brothers and Sisters, and walk round that blood-stained altar. And as you mark its four-square form and its horns of strength and see the sacrifices smoking thereon, acceptable to God, look down and mark the blood with which its foundations are so completely saturated and understand how all salvation and all acceptance rests on the Atonement of the dying Son of God!

We will pass on to observe, next, the materials of which the altar was made, for these also were instructive. It was made of acacia wood, overlaid with brass. The acacia wood is always understood to represent the incorruptible Human Character of our Lord Jesus, for this was a wood which would not rot, even as Jesus, when tempted, even in all points like as we are, yet remained without sin. The brass, of course, was necessary as an outer covering, lest the altar should be consumed by the flames. It had to bear perpetually the blazing and the burning fire—and so we in the brass see the endurance of Christ—how His loins were girt about with power, and how the Divinity within sustained the perfect Man while He bore—

> "All that Incarnate God could bear,
> With strength enough and none to spare."

Look on that brass, Christian, with admiring eyes. Think how oftentimes it was heated by the fire, and then look upon your Lord and think how in soul and body He was tortured and tormented for your sins, and reflect how strong He must have been to suffer so as to be able to bear the whole of Divine wrath and make a complete Atonement for the transgressions of His elect! The fire which burnt upon the altar also deserves to be noticed. It was doubtless no common fire of ordinary culinary use. It fell from Heaven and there may have been qualities about which rendered it different than any other. For instance, it may have left none of that residue of ash, and smoke, and filth that would be found in the use of ordinary fire.

It may have been like lightning in its force and pureness. Complaints were always made of the old heathen temples, of the abundance of flies and filth found there. Hence the Jews were accustomed in derision to call the idol god Baal, Baalzebub, or the god of flies, because of the abundance of such noxious creatures found in his temples. Probably there were none such in God's temple, for the Lord's fire slew every unclean thing. This fire had noble and distinct qualities, consuming and blazing after a nobler and purer sort than ordinary

flames—and certainly our Lord Jesus Christ has burning upon His altar no impure flames! Love burns there which sprang only from His own bosom! A holy zeal burns there without the slightest admixture of self-love! The Holy Spirit burns there, that purest and best of flames that can rest on mortal men! And there, too, burned the fire of Divine wrath, which was a holy jealousy against sin! And when God Himself comes upon that altar to accept His people, it is a Divine acceptance unutterably glorious!

But I must not detain you longer. If you will read the passage at home you will find abundance of matter suggestive of the Person and the work of Jesus Christ. To Him must we always come in heart and soul. We know of no holy place now, nor holy days, nor holy implements. Our soul serves God in spirit, for He is a Spirit and seeks those to worship Him who do so in spirit and in truth. Our soul gives to Jesus Christ preeminence in all her trusting—coming to God only through Him—and never thinking that she can either serve, or worship, or live aright except as she dwells in Christ, and the merit of Christ commends her to the Father.

That is the thought, the one thought I wish to bring forward—and though I cannot speak this morning as I would—yet if that abides with you, this hour shall not have been lost time.

II. Now a question or two. My first inquiry is, Have you and I always taken care to keep to the one spiritual Altar? The sin of this age is idolatry. The whole tendency of this generation is towards the setting up of other than spiritual altars. The only way to come to God is spiritually through Jesus Christ—but you will find yourself, dear Friend, frequently tempted to make something else the vehicle of access to God—and to render homage to Him through some other vehicle.

You may depend upon it, that the belief that this building or that any other building is a house of God, a place peculiarly suitable for worship, is idolatry! You are giving to bricks and mortar some little of the honor which is due only to Christ as an Altar! If you suppose that there is any more acceptableness to God in a Church or a Cathedral than in any public hall or in the open air, you have made a material building into an altar—you have gone back to the types and have missed the Antitype—and so far have robbed Christ of a portion of His glory. If you look upon any material substances as being holy, or, I will add, upon any postures—whether kneeling, standing, or sitting—as having in them any kind of holiness, or if, in fact, you get away from the spiritual in any manner—begin in any sort, or mode, or degree, to attach reverence to the physical and to the material—you have so far wandered away from the simplicity of Christ, you have set up an Antichrist—and you have robbed the Lord Jesus.

God will never put away the sin of this land until the belief in material consecration is given up! Thus spoke Isaiah of old: "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin; when he makes all the stones of the altar as

chalkstones that are beaten in sunder, the groves and images shall not stand up." We must do away with idols and learn that there is no more holiness in our parish steeple-houses, called Churches, or in our Chapels or Cathedrals, than in barns and hovels! God abhors our idolatry, and will visit us for it unless we repent and turn from it! We cannot hope, in this England of ours, to see restored to us the purity of the Gospel until Protestants cleanse themselves of this antichristian, Popish belief and reverence for our postures, and places, and men, and days, and books, and I know not what beside!

Worship God, men! Demean not yourselves by paying reverence to anything else! Worship God in Jesus Christ! That is the one and only canon of worship—in the power of the eternal Spirit approach God through the merits of the Redeemer! And as for your so-called priests, and your churches, and your holy things—away with them! They are not to be borne by reason, much less by men of spiritual minds. Worship God in Jesus Christ and give the glory due unto His name wholly to Him—give none of it to things of human devising.

The next question is, Are there not some among you who have been offering to God without an altar at all? I mean this—you have been striving, you say, to do your duty—you are an honorable member of the State. You have sought to be religious, too, and you have come up with the assembly of God's people. You never forget the Sabbath, nor the offering of your morning and evening prayer. You believe yourself, therefore, to be among the good and the righteous, and you hope to be accepted at the bar of God.

Yes, I see your sacrifice, but where is your Altar? For be assured, God will not receive your sacrifice without an Altar, and for altars there is but one! You have forgotten, my dear Friend, the one great essential thing! According to our text, the altar sanctifies the gift—your gift is not sanctified at all then—it is an unsanctified, unacceptable gift. The whole of your life, though commendable in itself, and to be imitated by others in its outward development, is not accepted of God because you have never placed that life upon the appointed Altar of Christ Jesus! You have not offered it to God, having first trusted in Christ and looked to His merit for its acceptance. You have been depending upon yourself, and therefore you are no more likely to be saved than Cain was when he went about to offer a sacrifice of his own and could not submit to bring the lamb according to Divine appointment.

Oh, I could weep over some of you who have so much that is good about you, because you forget the Lord Jesus! Why, you have forgotten the one, the main, the essential thing! Those morning and evening prayers of yours—what are they? If you have not seen Jesus on the Cross—if you have not looked to His wounds—you have not prayed at all! That helping of the poor which is so kind of you—yes, but if you have not done it for His sake, trusting in Him, who, though He was rich, yet for your sake became poor—you have not done it unto God at all! And if you have been working and going about to establish your own righteousness—and have not submitted yourself to the righteousness of Christ—it will all be a failure.

You gentlemen who have brought up your families so well. You honest working men who fight the battle of life so valiantly. Oh, it is grievous to think that you should labor in vain and spend your strength for nothing! You bring your bullocks and your rams and sacrifice to God, and they are all an offense and an abomination because you do not bring them to the one appointed Altar! God help you to think of this and to repent of the folly and from now on live in consistency of character as you have done, but make not that your trust—come to Jesus first, and let the rest follow!

Next, my Brothers and Sisters, another inquiry for those of us who have brought our offerings and ourselves to God through Jesus Christ. Let me ask whether we have not often forgotten to attach the importance to the Altar which we should have done. I mean this—I pray, and when my prayer is done, I think within myself—will it prevail? And I remember that I did not plead the blood of Jesus as I ought to have done. I said, "for Jesus' sake"—I should be ashamed to pray except in His name—but did I realize that I could not be acceptable with God in myself—that it must be because of the Redeemer's perfections, sufferings, bloody sweat, passion, and resurrection that I must be heard?

Now my prayer has lost much power if I have not pleaded Christ's work, and Christ's merit with all my heart, and soul, and strength. To plead the merit of Jesus is the marrow of prayer—good words are but the bone. This is the soul of prayer! This it is that takes Heaven by storm! This moves the heart of God—the bringing before God the sacrifice of His dear Son, the making Gethsemane to ring, again, in the paternal ears—making the Cross to shine again before the Father's face, pleading earnestly because Jesus deserves abundantly!

Have we not often missed this? And if we have in our prayers, I am sure we have much more in our other engagements. I am afraid we preach without putting the sermon on the bronze Altar, and that we distribute our tracts or teach in the Sunday school, or talk of Christ with the sick and do it without presenting the service through the meritorious Person of our Lord. Oh, it is blessed when one has preached, and felt, "Well, I have not succeeded as I could desire. I have felt heavy in my Master's service, shut up so that I could not come forth. But still I meant to honor Him, and now, my God, accept my poor service for my Redeemer's sake." This is the way to put our service right on the Altar, and there it is sure to conquer!

Oh, then, it is so blessed to know that Jesus sanctifies the gift! The gift was nothing—a poor speech for His name, a scanty gift to His poor saints—but still, God receives it as He accepted the bullocks—not for the bullocks' sake, but for the Altar's sake! And so will He receive our faulty services for the sake of Jesus when we offer them through Him. Let your souls anchor themselves to the Atonement of Jesus! Cast more cords about yourself and bind your spirits fast to Him! You are never healthy, you are never strong, you are never happy, you are never lifted up towards Heaven except when you abide close to the Person of the Son of God made flesh for you. Never journey away from the Cross. Seek other Truths

of God and delight in other beauties if you will, but the first Truth and the first beauty in Heaven and earth is the Crucified Redeemer—keep to Him and rejoice in Him.

I shall not detain you longer except to say this. Have we, dear Friends, as Believers, ever fed at this Altar? For we have an Altar of which they have no right to eat that serve the tabernacle. That is to say, those who trust in ceremonies have no right to Christ! Those who think themselves priests above their fellow Christians cannot taste Christ—they are shut out by their own act and deed—they have no right there. But we who do not serve the outward tabernacle—we have come to spiritual worship, by God's Grace, and we have a right to eat at the Altar of Christ. Here is a choice morsel for us—God has accepted us in Christ!

Feed on that, Christian! You have condemned yourself but God has accepted you! Men have criticized and censured you, but in Christ God has accepted those imperfect works of yours! Why, it is enough for a courtier if his king smiles— is it not enough for you? No, lie not down and groan, and cry because you have not acted perfectly—but having repented of every omission and transgression, rise up with courage to do better things—because even your worst things have been accepted! Feed on Christ who makes you accepted! Feed on the acceptance itself, and so like the priest, commune with God at His table. And if you have already laid yourself upon the Altar of Christ as a reasonable sacrifice, come and do it again!

It is very desirable to frequently renew our consecration to Jesus. "Yours we are, Son of David, and all that we have." You who have been bought with His blood, drawn near to Him and yield yourselves anew to Him this morning. You admit the soft impeachment that you are His in blessed marriage bonds—come, then, and declare anew—"My Lord, take me wholly! Use me, use me to the last ounce! Use me up! Grant that there may not be a hair of my head, nor a drop of my blood, nor a beating of my pulse which is not Yours! Lord, I make no reserve. I give You my children, my house, my property, my time, my body, my soul—and I do not ask You to spare me and give me an easy life. Do as You will with me, only glorify Yourself in me!"

When the bullock was on the altar, the flesh-hook was used to aid in burning it completely—the priest desired that there should be nothing of the offering left. "So, Lord, if You use the flesh-hook of affliction to drag me into the fire, so let it be. I would that You should win as much glory out of me as You can extract from a mortal man by suffering, or by service. Appoint me what you will, only, Father, glorify Yourself, and enable me to glorify You!"

If we shall thus consecrate ourselves, there will be better days in store for us than we have as yet known, and the Church and the world will know that God has worked wonders for us! May God give you a blessing, for His name's sake. Amen.